DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 380 EC 172 749

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TITLE Project INTERACT: Job-Related Social Skills to Facilitate School-to-Work Transition.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Secondary, Transitional and Postsecondary Education for Exceptional Youth (Boston, MA, March 7-9, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; *Education Work Relationship; Interpersonal Competence; Mild Disabilities; Secondary Education; Social Development; *Vocational Adjustment

ABSTRACT

Project INTERACT, a Job Training and Partnership Act state funded project, is designed to facilitate school-to-work transition for mildly to moderately handicapped adolescents. The program provides school-based instruction in social behaviors associated with successful job performances. Following instruction, the students are provided with non-subsidized community-based employment to promote generalization and maintenance of acquired social skills. Communication skills, problem solving and decision making, self-monitoring, and networking skills are included. Procedures for individual assessment and program evaluation include attitudinal surveys, rating scales, and criterion-referenced tests. (Author)

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ED258380

Project INTERACT: Job-Related Social Skills to Facilitate School-to-Work Transition

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EC 172749

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Abstract

Project INTERACT, a Job Training and Partnership Act state funded project, is designed to facilitate school-to-work transition for mildly to moderately handicapped adolescents. The program provides school-based instruction in social behaviors associated with successful job performance. Following instruction, the students are provided with non-subsidized community-based employment to promote generalization and maintenance of acquired social skills. Communication skills, problem solving and decision making, self-monitoring, and networking skills are included. Procedures for individual assessment and program evaluation include attitudinal surveys, rating scales, and criterion-referenced tests.

Project INTERACT, a Job Training and Partnership Act state funded project, is designed to facilitate school-to-work transition for mildly to moderately handicapped adolescents. Job related social skills for obtaining and maintaining employment are essential for occupational success. Without these critical social behaviors, handicapped adolescents are at an enormous disadvantage in the work world. Project INTERACT, the result of a coordinated effort between the Flagstaff Unified School District in Flagstaff, Arizona and the private sector, seeks to facilitate transition by providing direct instruction in social skills and monitoring on-the-job performance.

The project serves adolescents who are placed in secondary programs for learning disabled (LD), emotionally handicapped (EH), and educable mentally handicapped (EMH). The district in which this program was implemented had a work experience program for special education students in place. A needs survey conducted recently indicated that approximately one-third of the handicapped students participating in the work experience program lost their jobs due to poor social skills. Furthermore, considerable effort was expended by the work experience coordinator in close monitoring of each student's job performance. Based on these needs, the following seven project goals were developed.

1. Establish a program that provides activities to facilitate school-to-work transition for adolescents placed in LD, EH, or EMH programs.
2. Develop an instructional program to teach job-related social skills, communication skills, problem solving and decision making.
3. Vocationally assess and place handicapped adolescents in nonsubsidized community-based employment.
4. Monitor students' on-the-job performance following school-based training.
5. Promote students' employment independence and self-sufficiency during follow-up.

6. Disseminate information about the program to employers and community groups.

7. Evaluate the individual's progress and the program's effectiveness by utilizing vocational aptitude measures, attitudinal scales, criterion-referenced measures, and other questionnaires.

The program has two primary focuses: 1) a school-based instructional program that stresses acquisition of social behaviors as they relate to job finding, getting, and holding, and 2) nonsubsidized community-based work experience to promote generalization and maintenance of the learned behaviors.

Project Phases

The project is divided into three phases: 1) the organizational phase, 2) the implementation phase, and 3) the program evaluation phase. The implementation phase consists of three components: 1) the instructional component, 2) a monitoring component, and 3) a follow-up component. Figure 1 illustrates the project divisions and provides a timeline for activities.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Phase I: Organization

Organizational activities include instructor training, student intake and assessment, and information dissemination to employers. The instructor is trained in procedures for student intake and assessment, instruction and monitoring, and record keeping. Intake incorporates a parent/teacher/student conference during which the program is explained, and the student elects to participate. Vocational assessment utilizing the Microcomputer Evaluation and Screening Assessment (MESA, 1984) is conducted to determine the physical, academic, and intellectual skills in addition to vocational interests and awareness of each student (Sitlington, 1984). Social skill competency is measured by administering attitudinal scales developed for the project to

OPERATIONAL PLAN

ORGANIZATIONAL PERIOD	IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD			EVALUATION PERIOD
	Instructional Component	Monitoring Component	Follow-up Component	
(One month)	(Four weeks)	(Ten weeks)	(Three months)	(Ongoing)
-Instructor training -Intake -Assessment -Information dissemination	-Fourteen instructional sessions	-Daily student contact -Weekly job site visits -Four group meetings	-Decreased contact -Weekly student reports	-Individual progress -Program effectiveness

Figure 1: Project INTERACT Operational Plan

students, parents, and teachers. These rating scales provide records of perceived levels of social performance on a variety of skills. (See Figure 2 for a sampling of items from the rating scales.) Also, each student completes a job competency checklist that projects on-the-job performance of specific job maintenance skills. Following assessment, individual educational program (IEP) meetings are held. Students are placed in training groups of ten students. During the organizational period, employers are contacted personally, provided with written descriptions of the program, and invited to an information dissemination meeting.

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

Phase II: Implementation

Components of the implementation phase include instruction, monitoring, and follow-up.

Instructional component. Training comprises fourteen lessons over a four week period. Lessons reflect four skill modules: 1) self-esteem, 2) communication skills, 3) problem solving, and 4) job maintenance skills. Detailed lesson plans developed for each module reflect specific skills associated with each curricular area. The curriculum includes activities focusing on self-esteem. Low self-esteem and poor self-concept have been related to handicapped individuals' failure to succeed in the mainstream and with motivation to use skills and strategies present in their repertoire (Deshler, 1978; Gresham, 1981). Also, students are taught a generic problem solving strategy to assist them when on-the-job problems occur.

A review of related research, programs, and interventions indicated that techniques from cognitive psychology and behavior therapy have been effective in similar training programs (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Klein, 1980; Schumaker and Hazel, 1984; Whang, Fawcett, and Mathews, 1981). These techniques, including modeling, rehearsal, feedback, role-playing, self-monitoring, and transfer training, are incorporated into the lesson design. Figure 3 provides an overview of specific skills

STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS SURVEY

1. Do you listen carefully to instructions?
2. Do you follow instructions?
3. Do you express your fears?
4. Do you express your complaints/criticisms?
5. Do you laugh at the right time?
6. Do you accept compliments well?
7. Do you understand other people's emotions?
8. Do you take responsibility for your actions?
9. Are you confident?
10. Are you willing to join groups?
11. Do you follow through and finish what you start?
12. Are you honest with yourself?
13. Do you control your emotions and try to solve problems that arise?
14. Are you organized?
15. Do you avoid situations that might lead to trouble?

Figure 2: Sample items from social skills rating scale

addressed during the instructional component. When instruction is concluded, each student is placed in nonsubsidized community-based employment.

Monitoring component. Systematic monitoring of students' on-the-job performance over a ten week period consists of brief, daily contacts with students and weekly job site visitations. Contacts with students and their employers occur during the on-site visits, and brief reports regarding job performance are completed weekly by students and employers. In addition, students attend four school-based meetings with their original group. The focus of the meetings is application of acquired job-related social skills. Actual on-the-job problems and situations are discussed and role-played by the group.

Follow-up component. During follow-up, in-school and on-the-job contacts are decreased to once weekly or less depending on the individual's needs. Brief weekly reporting by students is continued. The purpose of diminished contact is to encourage students' employment independence and self-sufficiency. Networking skills whereby students employ a strategy to assist in job-related problem solving are strengthened and reinforced during this component. This strategy capitalizes on the peer relationships developed during the instructional sessions and facilitates students in actively seeking help.

(Insert Figure 3 about here)

Phase III: Evaluation

During the project's final phase, evaluation of individual progress and program effectiveness is conducted. Individual progress is measured by social skill surveys identical to those administered to students, parents, and teachers prior to program implementation. Responses are analyzed to determine an individual's change over time as perceived by the respondents. Also, students and employers complete instruments designed to measure perceptions of specfic job competencies and maintenance skills. The weekly reports are analyzed for trends and patterns of behavior for each student.

JOB-RELATED SOCIAL SKILLS

Module I - Self-Esteem

Making "I" statements
Developing pride
Self-monitoring

Module II - Communication Skills

Introductions
Asking and answering questions
Telephoning
Offering assistance
Answering a complaint
Listening to others
Feelings
Compliments

Module III - Problem Solving

Acquisition of problem solving strategy
Application of problem solving strategy
Self-monitoring
Networking

Module IV - Job Maintenance Skills

Impressions
Promptness
Relationships
Attitudes

Figure 3: Job-related social skills taught during instructional component

Program effectiveness focuses on group success rates and gains in social competencies. All instructional sessions are videotaped for evaluation. Questionnaires regarding overall program evaluation are distributed and completed by all participating students, their parents, school personnel, and employers.

Conclusion

Project INTERACT was designed to facilitate school-to-work transition for mildly to moderately handicapped adolescents by providing them with a repertoire of social behaviors associated with employment success. This social skills training program can be adapted easily by districts that currently have work experience programs in place or by districts that are initiating on-the-job training programs. This program should provide students who lack social skills a greater opportunity for occupational success.

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